

(An irregular publication for the Town Planning Research Group, not for publication or republication)

This Issue:

- 1) The Urban Renewal Act 1970
or can the Housing Commission Turn itself inside out ?.
- 2) Decentralisation Comments
or Hark, Hark the Clark!

(Before we start.....

Have you noticed there were more topical issues in November.. December than you could poke a stick at ?

For example:-

(i) Land Conservation Bill,

(ii) State Development Bill

(iii) National Parks Bill

(iv) Environment Protection Bill

(v) Melbourne Underground Rail Loop

(vi) Westernport Development Bill

(vii) Seminar on Technical Advisory Committee's Report on the draft M.M. B. W. Residential Planning Standards!

(viii) Seminar on Environmental Development of Outer Melbourne

(ix) The Urban Renewal Act.

This issue we only deal with the last of the list. Ideas on any other issues, listed or not, please send to the editor)

I) The Urban Renewal Act 1970

or Can the Housing Commission Turn Itself Inside Out ?

(by Alpha)

The Urban Renewal Bill has been carried. The first battle is over. The Housing Commission is to be the urban renewal authority!

Sure: any municipal Council can put up a renewal proposal also, but as Mr. Meagher puts it: "The Housing Commission is the one body which has at its disposal certain funds with which to carry out its work and it can be expected to be the body to which Councils would look when seeking assistance on this type of proposal" . (Hansard 14.II. '70).

Sure : Parliament can set up any other authority it likes to use the machinery of the Act but the Government has not made any suggestion as to how or when this might be done.

So : the outcome of the Urban Renewal Act is that the Housing Commission is to have extensive new powers.

Mr. Meagher denies this. Characteristically illogical when making debating points he says... "The Bill does not propose an increase in the powers of the Housing Commission... but only endeavours to increase the responsibilities of the Commission (Hansard p. 1584)

Elsewhere, however, he has to explain the new structure of the Housing Commission, and that the old powers of slum reclamation and housing will remain (two of the old Commissioners under Mr Gaskin's chairmanship being responsible) and new powers of "urban renewal" will be added (two newly-appointed Commissioners, also under Mr Gaskin's chairmanship, being responsible)

Although the Commission have always had powers to loan money for

rehabilitation, they have never recently added this technique to their 2
armoury of weapons which of late years has consisted entirely of
complete block-demolition (including varying proportions of perfectly
sound houses which are either not "slums" or which could be "unslummed"
at comparatively small expense; and the erection on the sites of high-
rise flats or privately -built 3 story walk -up flats for sale to
higher income groups.

One defence advanced for the Urban Renewal Act is that it is only
machinery, which in itself is neither good nor ill, but which can be
administered for good or ill.

We comment on the quality of the implementation below. Here we wish
to comment on the Housing Commission as the user of the implement.

It is true, of course, that the Housing Commission has satisfied
desperate housing needs for many thousands relatively well. It is quite
justifiable for Mr. Tripovitch M.L.C. to say ... "If the Commission
decided to provide 1000 homes there (in the outer areas) tomorrow I
would be glad to see them. I would not object, I lived happily in a
Housing Commission concrete home for eighteen years " (Hansard 28.II '70
p. 2407)

But for the inner areas the Commission in the 1960s has had long
practice on the physical side of planning with nothing more selective
than a bull-dozers. The pruning and grafting of rehabilitation being
unknown arts, and on the sociological side its main pre-occupation has
not been to preserve communities, but how to destroy them by eviction
dealing with people one-by-one and not as a community. Community
proposals are always treated as hostile and unacceptable. Mr Meagher
chooses to see any new idea as party -political opposition.

In these circumstances, can the Commission be expected to turn itself
inside out ?. Will the new Commissioners be enough to convert it into
a benevolent administration of the Urban Renewal Act. ?

Surface dressing will not be enough. One can imagine a P.R. exercise
where the familiar block clearance job is done, just as before, but it
would be camouflaged by declaring a much wider area all around the "block"
to be victimised the whole garnished with surveys, notifications and
even consultations and avoiding the worst boo-boos of past practices
such as failure to supply in good time supplementary services as
elementary as schools. All this however could result in block operation
remaining with the same essential character as of old.

One can expect the Commission to switch the Holmesglen pre-cast
concrete factory from the high-rise model to a five storey lift-served
model.

One can even imagine the Commission producing a "show-piece" of
urban renewal as it should be done as a diversionary tactic while block
reclamation in the familiar destructive style whether old or newly
dressed proceeds apace elsewhere. (The Commission is not beyond this.
"park Towers" in South Melbourne has specially selected better-class
tennants to make of it a show piece.)

Wherever it happens; whatever form it takes and whenever it starts,
however, it is guaranteed that the Commission's operations will take
place under a searching floodlight of an aroused public concern.

A year ago, when the first two (now abandoned) urban renewal bills
were introduced, only the Committee for Urban Action (II associations)
and the Town and Country Planning Association objected.

By November of this year however a formidable list of professional and
other organisations opposing the Bill had been added, including the
Royal Australian Institute of Architects, the Royal Australian Planning
Institute, the Urban Land Institute, the Australian Institute of Urban
Studies, the Surveyors Institute, the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce,
the Fitzroy Council, the Victorian Council of Social Services, the
Brotherhood of St. Laurence, the Inter Church Inner Areas Commission
(4 Churches) the Real Estate and Stock Institute and the Council for
Civil Liberties.

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Confronted with such a solid body of diverse opinion from informed people some amendments were made to the Bill during its passage, some in the Lower House and some in the Upper House.

Most vital of these were...

1) An Urban Renewal Advisory Committee "shall" be appointed (instead of "may" be)

2) The Minister, before final approval of an urban renewal proposal must submit a copy of it to the Town and Country Planning Board and must obtain and consider a report by the Board before making a final decision and

3) The urban renewal proposal must indicate the provision proposed to be made for the accommodation within the area or its immediate vicinity of persons who will be displaced and who desire to continue to reside in the area (but this will be pointless unless new accommodation is ready before old accommodation is taken. It is no use scattering people and expecting them to be able to reassemble in two years time.

In addition, Mr Hamer in the Upper House made a forthright statement.

"..... If there were in the past large areas of so-called slums or sub-standard dwellings which needed to be restored in toto, we must be now in an era where there are fewer and fewer of them. This Bill places some emphasis on restoration. Arrangements can be entered into with some owners to renew and restore their properties. I hope this power will be extensively used in preference to demolition (Hansard 28.II. '70 p. 2547)

Good! Mr. Hamer has shifted his ground considerably in the space of three years. In Feb. 1968 he said "Another basic policy decision adopted by the Government is that the inner suburbs of Melbourne, parts of which are now more than 100 years old, must be progressively redeveloped... such a policy envisages a population increase of 500,000 by redevelopment of inner suburbs (Hansard 24.2.'68 p 3246)

Instead of 500,000 he now says "probably it will turn out that the eventual increase is not much more than 50,000 people (Hansard 18.II.70 p. 2016)

Mr. Meagher and Mr. Gaskin are invited to make public statements on their preferences for restoration over demolition in line with Mr. Hamer and to draw plans that prove they mean what they say!!

Incidentally this does not mean that it is impossible to increase densities in the inner areas. Land such as saleyards, abattoirs, railway reserves, gasometers, rifle range, bulk storage, Council "yards", Commonwealth establishments, tumble down factories would provide hundreds of acres for higher density housing, higher density factories schools and recreation.

Moreover whilst the older solidly constructed homes around the innermost inner suburbs are mostly highly restorable, the same cannot be said for all and the more recent, mainly timber housing somewhat further out. Given the opportunity and financial and technical assistance, owners under their own co-operative efforts, would surely welcome the opportunity of demolition, assembly of larger sites and reconstruction to different more convenient design and amenity and this too should be part of the renewal technique.

Finally, whether the Act, used, shall we say by Mr. Hamer could be a "good" piece of machinery or whether it could be better.

In our opinion the Act falls short in these respects:

1) "Renewal" starts with physical instead of community aspects.

A map of a proposed renewal area is the first process, not a survey of community needs. Both Mr Meagher and Mr Hamer rejected the opposition resolutions that a renewal authority should, as the first step, conduct

a survey of the social structure and desires of the people, the social services, the land use, sub-standard buildings etc, before asking the Government for authority to prepare a renewal proposal. The reasons the Ministers give against the Opposition amendment are instructive. Both Meagher and Hamer consider that people would be "apprehensive" and may be disturbed for nothing if the Government rejected the authorities' application to proceed.

Precisely. People have come to fear the Commission because of its methods. "apprehension" correctly describes the relationship.

Yet ordinary people in the early 1940s welcomed the Housing Commission as a potent and enlightened planning authority to prevent unsocial developments.

If the Commission started with constructive ideas for the communities concerned and began to base itself on these, then instead of apprehension there would develop competition to welcome the renewal authority to step in and help. Of course there are other overall planning policies to be integrated with local requirements, but skilful planning would try to accommodate the general to the local.

The Act however starts the wrong way around. The renewal authority in conjunction with other authorities clandestinely prepares the case as to which area is to be tackled. "who said we need renewing?" would be a predictable reaction when the announcement drops from heaven. In addition to apprehension there will be resentment when the people of the area are confronted with a fait accompli that the renewal authority is to prepare a proposal for their area. Lack of provision for co-operative effort (mentioned above) is indicative of a lack of concern for genuine community effort.

2) "Notification" is not "Consultation" and "Consultation" is not "Public Participation"

Despite flowery language about consulting with people concerned in introducing the Bill, the Act provides only the most rudimentary of democratic procedures, hardly reaching the status even of "consultation planning" procedures. Although the Commission has to "consult" with the responsible planning authority (ie. the M.M.B.W. or the local Council) it only has to have "regard" to any "recommendations" of the National Trust or any social or ethnic or community group which "in the opinion of the Minister represents the interests of persons residing or owning property" in the area, or the advisory committee, all of which are to be "notified" in writing of the preparation of the renewal proposal.

Nothing in the Act compels the renewal authority in the process of planning to tell these bodies what ideas the authority (ie. the Renewal Authority itself) is developing about the areas.

There is the procedure of public exhibition and objection familiar to planning schemes only after the renewal proposal has been completed.

Mr. Meagher demonstrated his complete inability even to grasp the quite fundamental concept that planners should produce alternatives based on different value judgements for public discussion in the formative stages. Thus trying to plan with people instead of only for them. Characteristically putting up a "straw man" case and knocking it down "...to place a half a dozen separate proposals before the public or department would be a time wasting and confusing" ... !! (Hansard 14.II. '70. p. 1582) who said anything about "half a dozen" ?!

"The purpose of the Government is requiring development proposals to be put before the public, other bodies and departments is at least to give them a starting point for discussions... to give people something to criticise... and enable people to say whether it should be varied and if so how. It is competent for anyone to say. 'We think the whole thing is bad, and that you should start again'" (Hansard p. 1582)

"Proposals shall be prepared not in secret but in public and in the light of public examination and criticism (p. 1581. Hansard)
Two typical Meagherisms. Insofar as it relates to "the public" the Act does not provide that renewal proposals be put before anyone at all in the course of preparation, only after they are complete (Sec. 5 (1)). When only the remedy of "objection" (not "a starting point for discussion") is then available.

Either, 1). Mr Meagher does not understand his own Bill, or 2), he was "putting one over" or 3), he has already decided to "turn himself inside out" as an administrator and disclose the plans of the renewal authority to the public before they are completed and outside the terms of the new Act.

We leave our readers to take their pick.

3). "Housers" are not "Planners" and Neither "Housers" nor "Planners" are "Renewers".

Although the Commission has to refer a renewal proposal to other planning authorities both upwards (The M.M.B.W. and the Town and Country Planning Board) and downwards (the local Councils) it will be itself a planning body, Mr Meagher says it will not be a "supreme planning authority" because the renewal authority "is required to comply with town planning specifications... and is subject in the final analysis to approval, not only by the Town and Country Planning Board but by the Government of the day" (p. 1580 Hansard)

Furthermore, the renewal authority is not required "to comply with town planning specifications". In fact, if the renewal proposals run counter to the M.M.B.W. planning scheme the Act provides for amendment to the scheme to bring it into line with the renewal proposals.

Moreover, Mr Hamer says. "What this Bill envisages is urban renewal on a much larger and more comprehensive scale" than the haphazard de facto private "renewal" now going on (p. 2015 Hansard) and Mr Meagher indicated he had already made approaches to Canberra to augment funds to enable operations on a bigger scale.

As evidence of planning machinery the Act seems unsatisfactory, whatever the personnel because it is tied to housing rather than planning. One of the amendments provides that the Chairman can "for the better Co-ordination of the Commission's functions" call a meeting of all members of the Commission (i.e. the two under the Housing Act and the two under the Renewal Act, all four under his chairmanship) and at such meeting "there shall be a quorum and all members present shall be entitled to vote" (Hansard p. 1846)

Therefore it is idle to think that even if the two new Commissioners (Urban Renewal) are equipped with very sensitive and strong minded planning principles, they could prevail against the three present Commissioners whose whole training has been on re-housing (block demolition) style.

Moreover, instead of being the responsibility of the Minister responsible for town planning! The Commissioner's (Renewal) although they are (or should be) planners and sociologists come under the Minister of Housing.

Housing is only one aspect of planning, and planning should be primary. The Act puts the emphasis the opposite way. Even the finances to the extent they come from Federal sources come as part of the Housing function under the Federal Minister of Housing.. In the words of the submission of the Committee for Urban Action. "It is imperative that the public housing programmes be separated from any ^{urban renewal} program. the interests of one conflict with the demands of the other." Of course they should not, but they have!

In America, they seem to have a word for people whose job it is to supply housing for low income groups. "Housers", They call them! Well a

"houser" is not a "planner" of the traditional training still less a "renewal planner" or "renewer". There is nothing the matter with "co-ordinating" the "housers" of the Commission, with the "renewal planners" in the Commission as required, but there should be equal co-ordination between these and the "schholers" (Education Dept), the "Social Welfarers", the "transporters", and the suppliers of shops, jobs recreation and so on/

More fundamentally, the real danger is that the general climate of professional opinion whether it be the planners in the Town and Country Planning Board, the M.M.B.W., or local Councils, will continue along the old lines of "zoning" as "tidying up" the inner areas, carefully separating the factories from the houses and both from shops, and that this body of opinion will continue with the old idea that any building 100 years of age is "worn out" in the sense of needing complete replacement. Such thinking would impose on the Commission "renewers" from outside incorrect standards and criteria,

The sophistication required specifically of competent "renewal planners" (which the faithful preservation of a few choice areas is only the start and not the finish) is beyond anything yet seen in Melbourne.

In a certain sense, Mr Meagher's rough and ready (but inaccurate) assurance that the "renewers" will be "required to comply with town-planning specifications" is alarming, because it reveals the depth of his failure to understand the very nature of the problem his Bill should have been designed to tackle, namely a delicate integration of new type renewal social planning within the more conventional, although changing framework of all-Melbourne planning still mainly on physical planning planning and services level.

He should have been saying "The renewers, I hope, basing themselves firmly on real community requirements, will produce plans for changes of a different type altogether to those contemplated by the 1954 Master Plan, and the Master plan or any local Council plan of the old type will need to be altered to comply with the specifications of the renewers."

What About the Local Councils?

At long last some of the local Councils e.g. Prahran and Collingwood are beginning to employ high-grade professional planners to prepare comprehensive local plans.

Hope for the future in all the present circumstances, may well prove stem from demands that the local Councils become renewal authorities as provided in the Act, on the basis of these comprehensive plans, backed to the hilt by the local people.

Finance, of course, would be decisive. If Councillors take the traditional attitude of encouraging the "redevelopment" of the inner areas with a view to increasing rates, their plans are likely to include overemphasis on "better-type" housing, high rise, or extension of high valued industrial zones into parts at present residential areas, defeating the very purpose of renewal.

Mr. Whitlam, in November has demanded that local Councils be represented on the Loan Council and Premiers' Conference and be given a reasonable share of the fiscal cake,

It is rumoured that the Federal Minister of Finance has before her a report on Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement which expires June 1971, highly critical of the redevelopment use by the Victorian Housing Commission of Federal funds.

The Federal authorities need to recast the whole basis of "housing" finance and need a new source of "renewal" finance.

The good fight for inner-suburban renewal on a humanitarian and sociologically sound foundation must be carried downwards to the grass root communities and upwards to the Federal authorities and in every possible direction.

The carrying of the Urban Renewal Act gives the appearance of being a victory for Mr. Meagher, But winning a battle in Parliament or in Cabinet through of short term importance, is not the same as winning. The peculiarity about planning is that if it is not attuned to the people it fails. Inevitably then the battles will continue, unless the Commission can turn itself inside out!

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2) DECENTRALISATION COMMENTS.

or Hark Hark the Clark ! (contributed by "Beta")

Dr. Colin Clark gave an address on "Decentralisation" to the October monthly Luncheon of the Melbourne University Graduates Union. His two main topics were decentralisation of government and decentralisation of population and industries,

He advocated the restoration of the taxing powers of the States and of local government which he said have been overshadowed by the Commonwealth control of income tax. In his opinion, many of the ills of State Govt, and local govt. arose from their inability to raise their own revenue and consequent reliance on Commonwealth aid. This decreased the need to be responsible to electors and turns them into the puppets of the Commonwealth authorities. He also pointed out the growth of government by public servants not responsible to the public except remotely through the Minister and Parliament.

All this, Dr. Clark thought should be stopped, and in effect the clock put back thirty or more years, then he implied everything would be alright. However he gave no indication as to the means of achieving this state of affairs!

In geographical decentralisation Dr. Clark was equally vague as to how it could be achieved except that he proposed a differential payroll tax. lesser for country manufacturers, might be introduced. He did not examine or even mention, any of the post war experiences in which at least in Victoria, practically no industry, which was transferred to a country town away from markets and raw materials has become established, in spite of railway freight and other concessions!

Dr. Clark advocated that satellite towns having a population of 100,000 should be established around Melbourne and that other population centres of 250,000 to 500,000 people should be encouraged!

This had been shown by the successful New Town experiment in the United Kingdom. He said that Sydney and Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane had all reached or passed this optimum size but he did not propose to reduce, only to contain these cities.

It was a disappointment that such a learned person presented his case in such a loose way and without recourse to the facts and the statistics readily available to substantiate the views he advanced!

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Fits and Pieces

New Chair of Town Planning.... 13 Sponsors

13 organisations whose donations made possible the elevation of the Department of Town and Regional Planning into a full-fledge faculty headed by Prof Ledger, are....

Myers, Carlton and United Brewery, Jennings, M.M.B.W., Housing Commission, A.P.M., B.H.P., the National Bank, The Commercial Bank, Country Roads Board, A.C.I., R.a.c.v, ICI.

But why should this be necessary? Why should not the community finance its own planning education to ensure that it is genuinely independent of sectional interests?

Jennings Brings in U.S., Firm for Land Venture
extracts from "Construction" Aug 24, 1970. page 21.

"A.V. Jennings Industries has joined forces with Kaiser Aetna, a large United States real estate company in a land development venture in Australia,

"at the outset its resources in cash and properties will be worth \$6 million which puts it into the front rank of such ventures in this country.

"The idea is to work with state and civic organisations on creative and balanced community developments....

"Sir Albert Jennings said 'It is becoming increasingly obvious that a closer association of private enterprise with government at all levels is desirable in order to overcome many of the problems associated with small-scale piecemeal development of land...."